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SUBJECT: MEPI-FUNDED REGIONAL CAMPAIGN SCHOOL BRINGS ARAB WOMEN TOGETHER TO STRENGTHEN THEIR POLITICAL SKILLS

1. (U) Summary. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) held in Kuwait from September 25 - 28, the fourth regional campaign school funded by the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI). "Partners in Participation" attracted women activists from 14 countries in the Middle East and North Africa. The goals of the four-day gathering were to encourage women to become more politically active, introduce them to their counterparts in other countries, and to develop their campaign and advocacy skills. Speakers included the Ambassador, who welcomed the group to Kuwait and also hosted a September 26 reception in their honor; Kuwaiti Minister of Planning and Minister of State for Administrative Development Affairs Dr. Ma'souma Al-Mubarak; former Canadian Prime Minister Kim Campbell; NDI Regional Director for Middle East and North Africa Les Campbell; and Representative Jane Harman (D-CA). The campaign school received positive, daily press coverage in Arabic and English dailies, and attracted the attention of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, which was holding a seminar on family values in the same hotel, as well as other embassies and organizations planning similar training events. Conferees were enthusiastic about the workshops and promised to maintain contact with each other through a website created by the International Republican Institute (IRI) which partnered with NDI for the event. End Summary.

The Workshop

2. (U) Working with the Kuwait Economic Society Women's Committee and the Women's Social and Cultural Society, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) held September 25 - 28 "Partners in Participation," the fourth regional women's political participation and campaign academy. The workshop brought together women from 14 countries from the Middle East and North Africa to share experiences and participate in workshops on campaign strategy, message development, voter outreach, and media relations.

Women Share the Responsibility of Shaping Policy

3. (U) Dr. Ma'souma Al-Mubarak, Kuwaiti Minister of Planning and Minister of State for Administrative Development Affairs and Kuwait's first female minister (also from the minority Shi'a population), opened the conference by acknowledging Kuwait's "delight" to host the meeting. She encouraged the gathered women to seize the opportunity to learn about political interaction skills and the electoral process so that they could become effective campaigners. Switching from English to Arabic, she stressed the importance of campaign finance and encouraged women to support other women. Commenting on the May 16 decision to grant Kuwaiti women their full political rights, she said their "role and status in society had changed" and Kuwaiti women would "stand proudly beside their fellow citizens and share the responsibility of making and running the country's policies."

Using MEPI to Support Regional Reforms

4. (U) The Ambassador also welcomed the group and expressed U.S. pleasure in supporting the conference through a MEPI grant. He recounted successful MEPI programs in the region since its 2002 creation and restated the U.S. commitment to support the conferees in their reform efforts, noting that there is no one-size-fits-all model for democratization. Using Kuwait as an example, he told the crowd that women's suffrage was achieved through the collaboration of different groups - students, academics, politicians, and activists - for one common goal. He encouraged the women to follow the Kuwaiti example and work together in pursuit of freedom, equality and liberty.

Breaking Down Barriers

5. (U) Former Canadian Prime Minister Kim Campbell delivered the keynote address and spoke about her experiences as the first female president of her high school student body, the first Canadian woman to serve as Minister of Justice and

Minister of Defense (as the latter, she was the first female Defense Minister from a NATO country), and the first Canadian woman to become Prime Minister. Explaining that although she did not want to only be known as the former PM, she said she recognized that her successes and failures could inspire others. Further commenting on the global scarcity of women in senior political positions, she drew from the social sciences and said from infancy, people unconsciously develop ideas on gender roles based on their surroundings and observations. Those who were children during the Margaret Thatcher era have no problem accepting a woman in a leadership role in contrast to others who see women in non-traditional roles and view it as "an exception to the rule." She encouraged women to break these stereotypes by being visible, openly confronting women who oppose women's political involvement, and being pragmatic and strategic in promoting social and political changes.

"When Women Help Women, Women Win"

16. (U) Representative Jane Harman (D-CA) delivered the closing address and talked about her experiences in running for Congress and Governor of California. She encouraged the participants to learn their issues and develop a clear message, called on the more experienced and influential women to mentor and guide younger activists, and asserted, "When women help women, there's nothing we can't do." She cautioned that the first race, as well as the second, is hard to win, and advised women not to give in to defeat. She also said that being a politician made her a better mother because her children learned to follow their passion, and being a mother made her a better politician because she knew how to listen to the needs and concerns of her constituents.

What Are Those Women Doing?

17. (SBU) There was ample press coverage all four days of the workshop with the English-language papers giving full-page coverage to the opening day. An article by Representative Harman, posted on the blog site tpmcafe.com was reprinted in its entirety, complete with reader comments. In addition to the press, the conference attracted the attention of local and international organizations. The Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic affairs was holding a seminar on family values in the same hotel and representatives repeatedly visited the conference rooms to ask women what they were discussing and to distribute brochures. Other embassies and the UNDP were also curious about the participants and agenda as they were planning similar activities. (Note: Post is in regular contact with the UNDP about its activities to promote women's political and social involvement. We have recommended that UNDP activities, to be carried out in conjunction with the GOK, complement, and not duplicate activities already underway through MEPI. Additionally, on the margins of the conference, IRI and the International Federation for Election Systems (IFES) both visited Kuwait to discuss program activities in advance of the 2007 parliamentary elections in which women will vote and run for office for the first time. End note.)

Comments on the Campaign School

18. (SBU) Kuwaiti and international participants were generally positive in their assessment. All cited as the highlight of the week the opportunity to meet other women and the realization that they are not alone in the struggle for equality. Although many women tended to segregate themselves into groups - those wearing the hijab and abaya, those wearing only the hijab, and the more secular - they worked well together on exercises and listened closely to messages about advocacy and the need to overcome religious and cultural differences and cooperate on issues of mutual interest. Kuwaiti Development Consultant Naima Al-Shayji told PolChief that although she had participated in other training opportunities, the lessons from this conference resonated more because her political participation is now a reality and no longer a concept. Other women confirmed they will run for office.

Conference Participants

19. (SBU) Algeria:

Salima Maafri Epse Aissou, Leader of the Women's Section of the Movement for a Peaceful Society (MSP)

Naima Draou Balhi, National Liberation Front (FLN)

Baya Djenane, Vice President of the Municipal Council of

Melbou

Meriem Ben Kherouf Lechneb, Leading member of the Women's Section of the El-Islah Party

Fatma-Zohra Chabati Mansouri, Former Member of Parliament and Trade Union Activist

Ouzna Cheikh Lousin Moula, Member of the Provincial Council of Tizi Ouzou, Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD)

10. (SBU) Bahrain:

Wajeha Aloryed, Progressive Democratic Tribune

Sakina Al Ekry, Member of the Board of Al-Wefaq

Layla Rajab, Chairperson, Gulf Center for Democratic Development

Wedad Jamsheer, National Democratic Action Society

Shoala Shakeeb, President, Al Mustaqbal Women's Society

11. (SBU) Egypt:

Abla Mohamed Omar El Hawary, General Manager of the Judicial Committee of Suheig

Azza Soliman Mohamed, Journalist and Member, National Democratic Party

Abir Hussein Mohamed Gabr Shalaby, General Coordinating Assistant for the Democratic Capacity Building Project

12. (SBU) Iraq:

Entiessar Abdul Kareem, Member of the Human Rights and Women's Rights Committee of the Council for Peace

Shula Ali Yasin, National Democratic Party

Bushrah H. Ali Al-Tamimi, Leader of the Women's Committee, Islamic Fadila (Virtue) Party

Tavga Mohamad Ali Mahamad Salih, Member of the Central Shura Council, Kurdistan Islamic Union

13. (SBU) Jordan:

Eryof Abdallah Musallam Alajwaleen, Director of Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development Community Center

Hiyam Al-Damra, Member of Al-Wasat Party

Hyaam Hasan Salem Al-Hweitat, Head of the Organizational Department of the Municipality of Al-Hassa

Amneh Issa Salem Khasawneh, Founding Member of the Irbid Province Branch of the Jordanian National Women's Committee

Raja Khater, Member of the Al-Wasat Party

Nour Saleh Mohammad Shannaq, Member of the Al-Ahd Party

14. (SBU) Kuwait:

Massouma Abdulla Al-Ali, Women's Social and Cultural Society

Fatima Al-Abdeli, Team Leader of the Health and Environment HSE Group with the Kuwait Oil Company

Khawla Al-Alteegi, Teacher's Society

Nabeela Al-Anjari, Assist Undersecretary for Tourism

Laila Al-Awadi, Head of the Revision and Auditing Department of the Ministry of Planning

Fatma, Al-B'dah, Al Islah

Najat AA Al-Hashash, Islamic Care, Women's Union

Salwa Al-Jasar, Assistant Professor with the Curriculum and Instruction Department, College of Education, Kuwait University, and General Director of Family Health

Lulwa Al-Mulla, Women's Social and Cultural Society
Tagreed Al-Mulla, Professor of Communications, Kuwait University

Sheika Al-Nisif, Women's Social and Cultural Society

Shoaia Al-Qasabi, Kuwait Women's Society for Community Services, Women's Union

Alanoud Al-Sharekh, Women's Social and Cultural Society
Shamael Al-Sharekh, Women's Social and Cultural Society
Bothaina Al-Thaaqeb, Bayader Al-Salam Society, Women's Union
Mariam Bushari, Kuwait Economic Society
Rola Dashti, Kuwait Economic Society
Kawther Al-Jouan, Member of the Kuwait Graduate Society
Khadija Al-Mohameed, Al Tawafik
Khalida Al-Mohamed, Al Tawafik

15. (SBU) Lebanon:

Maha Al-Azar, Media Relations Officer of Information and Public Relations at the American University in Beirut

Mariam Al-Shami, Head of Arab Lawyers' Association

Doreen Khoury, Executive Director of the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections

Sophie Rouillard Butros

16. (SBU) Mauritania:

Naha Mint Moukhness, President of the Union for Democracy and Progress (UDP)

17. (SBU) Morocco:

Nezha Alaoui, Director of the SOS Center for Children Women Victims of Violence in Kenitra

Naima Farah, Communal Councilor and Head of the Women's Wing of the National Rally of Independents (RNI)

Jamila Moualdi, Coordinator of the Tanger Section of the Alliance of Liberal Democrats and Member of the Central Committee of the Alliance of Liberal Democrats

Houria Ouachach, Member of the Central Committee of the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS)

18. (SBU) Oman:

Rafiah Al-Talei, Journalist with the Oman Newspaper

19. (SBU) Qatar:

Shikha Yousef Al Gefery, Member of the Central Municipal Council

20. (SBU) Saudi Arabia:

Manal Al-Sharif, Journalist with the Al-Watan Newspaper

Samar Fatany, Senior Announcer and Radio Journalist at Radio Jeddah

Rajaa Mohammed, Program Analyst for Environmental Programs with ARAMCO

21. (SBU) United Arab Emirates:

Ebtisam bin Howaiden Al-Kitbi, Assistant Professor in the College of Humanities and Social Science at UAE University

22. (SBU) West Bank and Gaza:

Hafsa Arram, Leader in the Bloc of the Women's Struggle, the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front

Amal Barghouthi, General Director, Working Palestinian Women's Society for Development

Asil Khalifa, Director of Women and Child Affairs Department in the Office of the Governor of Gaza

Asmahan Malaki, Coordinator of Women's Activities in Rural Areas, Palestinian Democratic Union (FIDA)

Farha Natour, Chairwoman of "Not to Forget" Palestinian Women's Association in Jenin

23. (SBU) Yemen

Bilqis Abu Osbo'a, Assistant Professor of Political Science

Asma Mohamed Othman Thabet Al-Ademi, Member of the Islah Party

Rahma Mohamed Saleh Sharaby, Director of Women's Committee
of the General People's Congress (GPC)

Ebtisam Ahmed Abdul Rahman Qarhash, Program Controller,
Cultural Development Programs Establishment

Saadah Saeed Mohammed Olayah, Member of the Central
Committee of the Nasserite Party

Aziza Sharaf Hameed Abdullah, Member of the Central
Committee of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP)

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